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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 6007
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 9602
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 9752
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 2991
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 4320
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0306
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3461
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1979
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4862
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0039
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 9654
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 9215
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 4487
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 6783
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
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RHMFISS/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

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SUBJECT: RECORD CROWD ATTENDS HARDLINE SEPARATIST GEELANI'S
RETURN TO KASHMIR

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Classified By: PolCouns Ted Osius, Reason 1.5 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a show of force as well as strength, hardline separatist Sayeed Ali Shah Geelani held a rally in Srinagar on April 22nd to mark his return to the Valley following cancer surgery in Mumbai. Our interlocutors say the rally was attended by several thousand mostly young people -- demonstrating a consolidation of the hardline faction of Kashmiris, who reject the current peace process and claim they will settle for nothing short of independence from India to resolve the conflict. Standing in Srinagar's Eidgah ground (or martyr's cemetery) Geelani denounced the United States for denying him a visa, saying the nation is a "murder country" and blaming Americans for killing thousands of Muslims across the world. Masked youths carrying the flags of Jamaat-ud Dawa (JuD) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) also attended the rally -- a unique demonstration of defiance even for Geelani, although he took pains to distance himself from the groups, saying they were there in their "individual capacity." End Summary.

A Relatively Large Showing

¶2. (C) Hardline Kashmiri Separatist leader Sayeed Ali Shah Geelani returned to the Srinagar Valley on April 22nd, following a successful kidney surgery in Mumbai. Geelani's followers arrived en masse, following him in a procession from the airport to a rally in the Eidgah (or martyr's

cemetery) in the old part of Srinagar, which is usually seen as a stronghold of moderate separatist Mirwaiz Omar Farooq. AFP journalist Izhar Wani told Senior Pol FSN that there were between 40,000 and 45,000 people in the rally, with mostly young people in the crowd, and Shujaat Bukhari of The Hindu said this was the biggest rally of the recent past. J&K Police Additional Director General Kuldeep Khoda, however, placed the crowd size at about 12,000 people. Muzamil Jalil of the Indian Express said this was a show of force from the rural, mostly Jamaat Islami party cadre from villages around Srinagar. He said the numbers likely demonstrate a frustration among the local population -- when nothing tangible comes out of dialogue for moderate separatists, the hardline gets strengthened.

Terrorists on Public Display

13. (C) Muzamil Jalil of the Indian Express said Geelani began to talk about his visa denial in a "sudden tirade against the US," and press reports say Geelani called America a "murder country" responsible for killing lakhs (or 100,000s) of Muslims across the world. Press reports detailed the appearance of masked youths carrying flags for JuD and LeT at the rally, indicating an unusually public nexus between Geelani, who has longstanding ties to the Hizbul Mujahideen, and the LeT, which is considered more hardline and Pakistani. Geelani distanced himself from the terrorist groups, saying he is for "peaceful struggle," but adding that if any armed group takes a procession there, they are doing it in their "individual capacity." Geelani denounced the peace process, declaring his intention to boycott the PM's round table process and any future election in J&K, rejecting President Musharraf's four point proposals for a resolution, as well as any notion of self-governance or soft borders. Geelani

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called for the struggle to continue until India declares a plebiscite in J&K, even if India and Pakistan reach an agreement independently to resolve their dispute. "Nothing short of independence is acceptable to the people of Kashmir," he claimed. Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party leaders later denounced the rally, saying the LeT's presence demonstrated that the situation in Srinagar is worsening day by day, and accusing the Congress-led government of being soft on terrorism.

A Growing Hardline?

14. (C) Comment: Geelani's return comes on the heels of multiple political rallies from across the spectrum of politicians in Srinagar, including moderate separatists, and should be seen in the context of the larger political campaign season that is fully underway in the Valley. At the very least, a public show of force by terrorists in the Valley will weaken former PDP Chief Minister Mufti Muhammad Sayeed's hand in trying to call for a withdrawal or drawdown of troops in J&K. Worse, however, would be if the warnings we have heard over the last several months from moderate separatists are true that Geelani's cadre would grow in strength if the Indian government remains quiet in the face of broad gestures by moderate leaders. It is likely too soon to tell if this rally will signal a resurgence of the hardline in Srinagar. Nonetheless, Geelani's open show of force with LeT in attendance suggests that he was an extremely poor candidate for a U.S. visa. End Comment.

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